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RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 0163  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 013361

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: MEGAWATI SURVEYS THE INDONESIAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

REF: A. 05 JAKARTA 15147 (MEGAWATI CRITICIZES YUDHOYONO)

[1](#)B. 05 JAKARTA 2378 (MEGAWATI WORRIES ABOUT ISLAMISTS)

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Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Lynn B. Pascoe, reason: 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) During a November 28 meeting with the Ambassador, former President Megawati Soekarnoputri avoided discussing whether she would consider cooperating with President Yudhoyono's government, bemoaned the increasing influence of Islamists in Indonesian politics, and outlined the challenges of decentralization. Megawati blamed Indonesia's constitution and resulting bureaucratic structural problems for the difficulties she encountered in carrying out her agenda as President, and noted that SBY was also finding it difficult to deliver on campaign promises. Megawati endorsed the idea of limiting the number of political parties in Indonesia and commented that the country was still evolving as a democracy. She seemed relaxed, confident and unusually talkative. End Summary.

OUT OF OFFICE, BUT NOT OUT OF POWER

[1](#)2. (C) The former President received the Ambassador in her Menteng residence and appeared to be in good health. Megawati expressed confidence about the strength of her political party, Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle (PDI-P), noting that PDI-P outperformed all of its political rivals in last year's provincial elections and asserting PDI-P carried its momentum into this year's local elections. She questioned whether her party could even be considered "out of power," as it controlled more provincial legislatures and Governor's offices than any other party, perhaps an even better indicator of a party's overall strength than its performance in national elections.

[1](#)3. (C) Megawati reviewed the expansive field of competing political parties and dismissed the vast majority of them as "young and inexperienced," asserting PDI-P's storied history and collection of talented cadres would guarantee its staying power. She pointed to uninspiring legislators in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR) from parties such as Prosperous Justice (PKS) and the Democratic Party (PD) as evidence of the importance of experience. Megawati supported

a proposal currently under consideration in the DPR to limit the number of political parties based on performance in national legislative elections and praised America's two-party system. She argued the seemingly limitless number of political parties in Indonesia muddled the political dialogue and necessitated onerous coalition building efforts. In Megawati's opinion, the recent U.S. mid-term elections reflected the fact that in the U.S., the two parties adjusted and responded to the voters needs.

#### TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

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¶4. (C) Addressing the Ambassador's question about the challenges of working in the opposition, Megawati seized the opportunity to blame an unwieldy bureaucracy for her shortcomings as President and subsequent defeat in the 2004 election. She suggested she would have enjoyed a much more successful presidency had she not endorsed the hastily conceived 1999 constitution, a document she blamed for handicapping the institution of the presidency with unnecessary bureaucratic impediments. She said SBY was experiencing the same bureaucratic frustrations that she did, and blamed international parties, including the U.S., for pushing Indonesia into democracy and reform without first installing a well-conceived institutional framework. Democracy, she said, was a "marathon and not a sprint," and though she complimented the American democratic model, she cautioned that Indonesian democracy was in its infancy compared to that of the United States.

¶5. (C) The former President held up her father's presidency as a model for articulating a vision for the country and then enjoying the institutional freedom needed to carry it out. She bemoaned the fact she was limited to only one short term, arguing that the lack of continuity in the presidency damaged the country. She said this lack of continuity harmed

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not only to the Indonesian people, but also all of South East Asia.

#### ISLAMIC PARTIES

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¶6. (C) Turning her attention to the increasing influence of Islamic political parties, Megawati stressed her belief that parties like PKS were not acting in the best interests of the country. She emphasized PDI-P's nationalist credentials and said both she and her party were committed to staving off the threat posed by religiously motivated parties. As evidence of her commitment to battling the likes of PKS, she noted that PDI-P had recently joined forces with Golkar and several other parties in an effort to keep the governorship of the province of Banten out of PKS hands. (Note: It appears their effort was successful, as preliminary returns from the November 26 election suggest the PKS candidate was defeated by the PDI-P supported Golkar incumbent).

¶7. (C) The Ambassador noted the importance of selling a party's vision to young Indonesians and asked Megawati how secular and religious parties were faring in the battle for the next generation. Megawati suggested the Islamist parties were strong at the grassroots level, but that PDI-P and other secular parties had successfully made the distinction between believing in the Islamic faith and supporting Islamic parties; PDI-P, in particular, had convinced growing numbers of young Indonesians of the merits of a secular party rooted in the ideology of Pancasila. Megawati said even in Aceh, arguably the most conservative province in Indonesia, anecdotal evidence suggested a majority of residents living in areas with shariah law were skeptical of the role of Islam in politics and increasingly turning to secular parties like PDI-P. Acehnese were becoming disillusioned with corporal punishment practices like caning and expressing dissatisfaction with compulsory wardrobe regulations.

## DECENTRALIZATION

18. (C) The former President expressed her concern with the growing economic and social disparities between some of Indonesia's provinces, and argued that decentralization was contributing to this problem. She contrasted the quality of the health and education infrastructure in Java with that of Papua, saying the provincial and district level governments in Papua were much less capable of addressing critical issues than their counterparts in Java. Decentralization was in some cases accentuating resource and leadership inequities, and she expressed hope that PDI-P's growing influence in local governments could help address this issue.

## COMMENT

19. (C) Megawati was in a much more expansive mood than we have seen in recent years. She dodged virtually every question she was asked (typically without even the pretense of an effort to link her responses to the queries), but seemed interested in discussing a range of issues nonetheless. On the crucial question of whether she might consider burying the hatchet with SBY and partnering with the government, she kept her cards very close to her chest. Megawati expressed concerns about SBY's political reliance on Islamic parties, Golkar's influence in the cabinet, and the fact that the President was politically constrained in his ability to pursue desperately needed reforms. She also all but acknowledged that she could address those concerns in one fell swoop by endorsing the government. She said nothing, however, to suggest that she had any plans to do so.

PASCOE